

# Plunged from Third Storey to Freedom

The stark truth of the "inside" of  
a Roman Catholic Slave Laundry  
as told by girls who escaped

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**A**  
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## FOREWORD

This is the story of two young girls who jumped from three stories high in a desperate effort to escape from a Roman Catholic Slave Laundry in Hobart, Tasmania, on 17th August, 1948. Both girls were, of course, gravely injured, and the nuns called Dr. Gaha, M.H.R. (R.C.) who ordered them to be taken to the Royal Hobart Public Hospital.

The Editor of "The Rock" (Australia's National Weekly Protestant Paper), Mr. J. W. Campbell, made a special trip to Tasmania where he conducted a personal investigation and wrote this article on his return to Sydney.

The girls, Beverley Jean Plummer (14 years of age) and Beverley Ann Oates (who had her 14th birthday in hospital) have lain seriously injured in the Royal Hobart Hospital for over three months.

Their story is confirmed by the declaration of another young woman Ruth Wise who, at an earlier date, escaped from the same institution.

It may be wondered why this pamphlet is being reprinted nearly forty years later. The simple reason is that, according to her own admission, Rome doesn't change. Such institutions as the Magdalen Laundry in Hobart still exist, with counterparts fully operational in Sydney and Brisbane.

Be believe the plight of individuals in these institutions must be kept before our eyes so that we may be prayerfully attentive to any appeals for help from similar slaves of Rome today.

— D. C. Shelton,  
Editor "The Rock",  
Box 17, Glebe, N.S.W. 2037  
March, 1982.

## GIRLS' PATHETIC STORIES

Beverley Plummer sustained a fractured spine and a fractured arm, and Beverley Oates a fractured thigh and a fractured wrist.

When interviewed both these young girls said that

tails of life behind the impregnable walls of the Magdalen Laundry.

The girls' stories (which are corroborated by affidavits given by other former inmates) are such that it would require a book to do them justice.

Briefly, the details are:

The younger, Beverley Oates, had been an inmate for over two years, having been placed in the care of the "kindly nuns" when she was eleven years old.

She was not, at the time, a Roman Catholic.

During this period she had to do the same amount of work as the other inmates, excepting that she went to school (inside the walls, of course) for an hour a day if pressure of work permitted. The teacher was a consecrate.

At the bedside interview Beverley explained that she could teach the consecrate more about arithmetic than she knew herself.

"And what about the nurses?" we asked.

"Oh! they are lovely. There is not one who is a bit scotty."

"Different to the nuns?"

And then it started.

### Sadistic Nuns

"The nuns? There is not one good one. They don't know how to be kind to anyone."

"Did they punish the girls?"



Mrs. O. S. Kasenkina, who made world headlines when she jumped from a window of the Soviet Consulate in New York, U.S.A. Why not the same publicity for Beverley Oates and Beverley Plummer, who jumped from a window in a Roman Catholic hell-hole?

they considered the prospect of being killed in their leap through the window was preferable to remaining any longer in the laundry.

### Stark Details

Statutory declarations were taken in the presence of a J.P. in which these young people set out the stark de-

"Punish! Would you call it punishment to be belted by a number of girls and nuns or consecrates together and then dragged to the lock-up?"

"What lock-up, Bev?"

"Any one of them! There are three of them. They are all pitch dark, and one is only three feet high."

"Oh, no! That must be wrong. Even a little girl like you couldn't stand up in that space!"

"Of course you can't stand up! You're not meant to stand up! They call it the 'Rats' Hole."

"But how do they get you in?"

"They shove you in head first; and you can only turn around by crawling. There isn't much room sideways, either, and the floor is earth because it is under the foundation."

"How long do you stay in there?"

"I have been in the lock-up for three days, and came out blue with cold."

"They don't give you radiators, eh?"

"Radiators!" laughed Bev, obviously thinking that all the

stupid people in the world must be outside convent buildings. "Radiators! They



Beverley Oates

don't even give you blankets. They even take your shoes off."

"But let's get this straight! You don't get a bed in any of the lock-ups. Where, then, do you sleep?"

"On the floor. The 'Rats' Hole' has an earth floor, and the other two (called the 'Black Hole of Calcutta' and 'Lilyville') have concrete floors. In one of them there is a cement ledge with a board on it which you can sleep on."

## Dry Bread

"They bring you food?"

"Oh, yes! Dry bread and jam, and if you want anything else you have to eat the scraps the other girls leave. When you come out you have to crawl on your knees and apologise to the nuns. If you won't do that you go back."

"And why would you get such severe punishment?"

"It usually started by 'breaking silence' during working hours or not doing your work properly. I used to resent being clipped by the 'favourite' girls, and if I gave them check they would start hitting me, and if I hit them back the nuns and consecrates would all get mixed up in it and I'd be dragged to the lock-up."

"Do many girls get into the lock-ups?"

"Oh, yes! Sometimes they are all full at once. I've been there more than 50 times."

"Do they teach you cooking or any domestic science?"

"No! A nun does the cooking, such as it is. I've never done any cooking."

"Sewing?"

"We have to mend our own clothes with a needle and thread, but mostly there is no cotton, so we repair them with pine. We don't do any other sewing. My last job was mak-

ing lace which they use for the priests' gowns."

Such is a record of a small part of the interview which Mr. Campbell (together with a number of Hobart Christians) had at the bedside of a charming child who had blossomed into womanhood behind convent walls.

The rest of the record includes the revelation that young Beverley was an inmate of various Protestant and State institutions until she was nine years of age, when she found a real home with a Mrs. and Miss Pedder in Hobart.

## Directed to Return

These two years concluded when the Pedders were directed to return Beverley to a State institution in Hobart, this direction being the outcome of a minor incident at school, when Beverley, with other children, was involved in a matter of books being misused from the library.

Said Mrs. and Miss Pedder to "The Rock" when we interviewed them at their home:

"We love Beverley dearly, and were deeply grieved when we had to hand her over. If we had known what she was to go through we would have died before we would have given her back to the State. We want to make a home for her again, and have been constantly visiting her at the hospital."

Our party of investigators was shown Beverley's former room, which had been kept intact since she left. All the toys were there in evidence, and drawers full of clothes (too small for use now, of course) still remained intact.

Miss Pedder explained that, since Bev's injury, she had written to a number of people, including the Social Services Department, offering to provide a home for "Bubby" (as she still calls Bev), but has not received a reply. The Pedders explain that their offer is unconditional. They are prepared to look after the child without recompense from the Infants' Welfare Department or to adopt her outright.

The home which they offer is modest, though a model of tidiness and cleanliness, and Miss Pedder, a few years ago, sat for and passed an examination to become a police-woman (the successful applicant, though greatly over the gazetted age limit, was, we found on investigation, an R.C. of course).

Pastor Pascoe, who accompanied our party to the Pedder home, guarantees their excellent character. They are, he said, valued members of his congregation. (They are Seventh Day Adventists.)

Beverley, during the interview, entreated all present to enable her to go back to the Pedders, "which was the only home where she had ever

known real love," and we were amazed to learn that she had not been visited in the hospital by any responsible person, with the exception of a psychiatrist, whose silence is ominous, knowing Rome's methods as we do. It is significant, perhaps, that other laundry escapees and ex-nuns and ex-priests have had the slur of insanity directed against them by the Roman church.

### No Inquiry

The absence of police investigation—indeed, the absence of inquiry of any kind—is inexplicable in the light of the revelations unearthed in three days the Editor of "The Rock," who is a total stranger to Tasmania.

Another ominous feature is the fact that, after the Editor of "The Rock" arrived in Tasmania, a mysterious "cousin" arrived at Beverley's bedside to tell her that she was going to live at her place. This "cousin" (a Roman Catholic, of course) is a total stranger to Beverley, and is generally believed to be no relation whatsoever.

[Beverley was compelled to become a Roman Catholic whilst in Magdalen Laundry. Now the R.C. church will always maintain to have a claim on her.]

Beverley says emphatically that she will run away again (if she has to jump from another window), unless she is

allowed to return to the Pedders.

This, of course, would be a tragedy, as it would result in Beverley's first appearance in a children's court as a "delinquent."

Rome, naturally, would be happy about this, as it would provide them with a basis to establish a whispering campaign to discredit the girl, whose action has brought to the spotlight of publicity the brutality which exists inside convent walls.

The second girl was Beverley Plummer, who had been an inmate of Magdalen Slave Laundry for two periods of six weeks and three months, with a period of five months

when she was sent to a Salvation Army Home. She sustained a fractured spine and a fractured leg when she jumped.

### CRUEL TREATMENT

Beverley says that a common form of punishment for her was to push her arms up her back "till it hurt very much." "Several times they threatened to cut off my hair." (Beverley has lovely hair.)

During the time she was there she did not go to school once, but worked from 8.15 a.m. till 5.45 p.m., chiefly on a mangle.

Said Beverley Plummer: "We planned to jump after we had told the nuns we would do so if they did not treat us



Externally, the Magdalen Laundry looks a haven of peace and beauty. Behind this beautiful church (Mount St. Canice's) lies the sweatshop from which the girls jumped.

better, and they had replied that 'we wouldn't be game.'

"We were returning from morning prayers and raced ahead of the rest to the dormitory. There was only one woman there at the time—she was ill.

"If we hadn't jumped straight away, we would have been caught and punished for running.

"I was very sorry for Beverley Oates, who used to get cruelly punished because she was very small. They didn't punish the big girls so much because we could hit back.

"Punishment was mostly for disobeying rules—particularly for breaking silence. We were only allowed to speak at special periods of about one hour a day.

"I am a member of the Salvation Army denomination, but I was forced to go to all the R.C. prayers and church services."

#### CRIPPLED INMATE

Both girls told of a 15-year-old girl who is a cripple and has to use crutches. She has been an inmate for about five months, and has been there before also. It is believed that this girl comes from a State institution.

Her job is standing up making lace. Sitting down is against the rules and punishable.

Beverley Plummer says that if any girl ever asked about being paid for work done, they received the stock reply that "they got their board."

When asked about the food, she said hotly, "I wouldn't give it to a pig."

She also confirms the statement of Beverley Oates that no instruction was given in cooking or dressmaking or sewing, nor in any other useful domestic work.

Only relatives were allowed to visit Magdalen, and then only once a month. Beverley's grandfather came to see her occasionally.

#### Inmate for 6 Years

Another young lady who related her story, to Mr. J. W. Campbell, told of her six years' experiences as a Magdalen laundry slave.

Seven months ago she escaped with two other girls by jumping through a second-storey window.

Her name is Ruth Wise, and she is now 22 years old. The two others were Bebe Briente and Betty Cripps.

● Bebe Briente was in for six years, having been put there by her foster-father in 1942.

● Betty Cripps "graduated" to the laundry at 14 years of age from St. Joseph's Orphanage, Hobart, where she had been since the age of seven.

She spent about four years in the laundry.

When these three young women escaped together at 3 p.m. on Regatta Day in March, 1948 (there were four, but one was recaptured), they made their way into the mountainous bush adjacent to the laundry.

Eventually they came down again into a public street late at night, hungry and cold, and threw themselves on the mercy of a young man.

Their dishevelled appearance, their inadequate clothing (Tasmania can be cold in March), and the fact that their footwear consisted of pieces of thick rubber tyre, caused the young man to believe their story, so he took them to the home of his mother.

#### Weeks of Hiding

The next few weeks were spent in hiding until suitable clothing could be gathered, when the girls got domestic positions and eventually separated.

It was not long, however, before the eternal vigilance of "Catholic Action" discovered the whereabouts of Ruth Wise, and to evade an obvious attempt at kidnapping by about a score of men (other witnesses as well as Ruth have testified to this), she had to change her employment.

Said Ruth, when interviewed by "The Rock":

"I believed in the Roman Catholic church once and endeavoured to practise it diligently, but its power is now broken. I have been baptised a Baptist.

"I agree that the statements of Beverley Oates and Beverley Plummer are a correct account of their experience in the 'Mag.'

"Bev. Oates was under my special care. I taught her the work when she first came there. She was a good kid and didn't get any beltings at first, but she was often in trouble later and was treated very cruelly.

"Bev. is very small, and was often chosen as a victim because she was easily handled.

"I got into the laundry through the Children's Court, where I was charged, at the age of 15, with stealing. The magistrate sent me to 'the Mag.' for six months. It was subsequently proven that I was not guilty, but the nuns would not release me, even when my six months were up.

"I ran away once before about two years ago with another girl, and went to her sister's place, but after about a month two Roman Catholic policewomen came in a car and took us both back. They promised to get us a job, but we heard no more about it.

#### Callous Nuns

"The nun was very nice whilst the policewomen were there, but immediately they

left we were made to change into a dress made from butcher's apron material. Our hair slides were also taken out and we had to take our shoes off, too.

"I refused to work, so I was put into the lock-up. I was there for nearly a month, and

was nearly blind when I came out. It is very dark.

"Food whilst in there consisted of soup like dish-water and any bread we got was scraps left by the other girls.

"I know all three lock-ups mentioned by the other girls. The one called 'Rat's Hole' be-

neath the foundation is no exaggeration.

"The only way to escape from the Laundry is over a high fence with the top specially sharpened, or else jump out of a window.

"About four years ago two girls jumped from the second-storey and both got hurt. Their names were Betty Denehe and Betty Ryan. Betty Denehe's father came and took her to hospital. Betty Ryan is out now, but is still suffering with her back as a result of her injury.

"I only know one nun who was popular with all. Her name was Sister Carmel. The other nuns didn't like her because she was kind to the girls, so she was transferred to the Laundry at Abbotsford, in Melbourne.

"This caused a strike, and about 25 girls went on to the tennis court and stayed there all night. The commotion caused by the enraged nuns chasing the girls with sticks and shouting at them, and the girls shouting back, resulted in a protest from the disturbed local residents. The row went on all night.

### Nun Marries

"I heard that Sister Carmel later herself ran away and got married.

"I had a strike myself once and threw a bucket of water over a nun. Seven or eight

consecrates dragged me to the lock-up and hurt my leg badly.

"Sometimes the nuns' plans missed fire, as in the case of a girl named Neta Mansfield, who was made to work in a dress made of chaff bags for punishment. When visitors came an attempt was made to put her in the lock-up, but she climbed on the kitchen roof and spoiled the show for the nuns by shouting out and attracting attention to her dress.

"Pictures were shown very occasionally, but any 'loving' scenes were cut out by placing a hand over the machine.

"Christmas was the only time food was in any way decent, and the girls were only allowed a bath on Saturday.

"The machinery is dangerous, and a couple of girls have had their hands flattened in the mangle.

"Since I have escaped I have contacted my auntie. She said she had received a letter from me telling her that I didn't want to come out. I did not write that letter, so it must have been a forgery, sent without my knowledge.

"Some time ago my father returned to 'the Mag.' for my clothing, and the nuns gave him £1, which is the only payment I have received for my six years of work.

"There are about 120 inmates in Magdalen Laundry, and many would leave if they could. About a dozen old



Ruth Wise, now free and happy after escaping from Magdalen Laundry by jumping from a second-storey window with two other girls in March, 1948. Ruth had been an inmate for six years; she is now 22 years of age.

women (some of them very old) work on the farm adjacent to the Laundry. There are about 20 cows and many pigs. The women do all

the work, including cleaning the pigsty.

"Only those who are too old to escape are allowed to work

TELEPHONE 9113



UNDER VICE-REGAL PATRONAGE

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DR TO

## MAGDALEN LAUNDRY

Mt. St. Canice, Hobart

C. 1111

Photograph of Magdalen Laundry invoice, showing it to be quite a commercial business, despite the fact that the girl slaves do not receive wages. Note that the laundry is under Vice-Regal patronage—by whose authority?

on the farm, because it was possible to escape from there.

### True Picture

"I have read the book which 'The Rock' published called 'Women in Chains', [this book is now out of print, Ed.] and can say that the part relating to Magdalen is very true. The cartoon which shows an old woman pushing a wheelbarrow to clean out the pigsty is very good. The woman it depicts is 86 years of age."

When asked about voting Ruth explained that they knew nothing about it. They read no daily papers, and were not even told what an election meant.

Space prevents us from giving much other interesting detail of the experience of Ruth Wise, but we believe that the ground which has been covered emphasises the need for urgent action if we are to retain those social and industrial conditions of which we are so proud.

It is evident that—

- This institution competes openly with other laundries in the world of commerce. Yet they operate with slave labour.
- Laws relating to the protection of workers from injury in machinery are violated. Was compensation paid to the injured operatives?
- Laws relating to the employment of juveniles are treated with obvious scorn.

• Education and the school leaving age? Beverley Oates received, at the best, one hour per day since the age of 11 years. Beverley Plummer, since the age of 14, none at all.

• "Freedom of worship" ignored. No Protestant chaplain is permitted to give spiritual attention to members of his denomination in these institutions, which presume to be a law unto themselves.

• No consideration is given to the moral welfare of the inmates. Innocent children are herded together with women whose character is, sometimes of a very low standard.

• Corporal punishment has been banned in prisons, even for men, in our enlightened age. Yet all inmates of Slave Laundries, both old and young, live in daily fear of it.

• Solitary confinement is prohibited even in the Australian Army. In R.C. laundries it is a standing order.

• An escapee from an ordinary gaol MUST be tried before a civil court. Yet regular policewomen presume to return escapees to the laundries without trial of any kind.

• To shanghai labour has been outlawed in our society since the days of the pirates. Yet these institutions are ever grasping to get free labour among girls in friendless and unfortunate circumstances.

• An ordinary citizen is subject to a penalty if they fail to vote in an election. Yet inmates of these places are PROHIBITED from doing so.

These pseudo-religious, wholly commercial Convent Laundries should receive the positive attention of every decent-minded legislator, regardless of his politics.

"The Rock" specialises in the welfare of unfortunate people who have been victims of R.C. Slave Laundries.

## Forced Back to Laundry

Since the foregoing stories appeared in "The Rock", we heard a rumour that Beverley Plummer had been forcibly taken back to the Laundry upon her discharge from hospital. We wrote to her private address and received the following reply on December 9th, 1948:

"Mr. Campbell,

"Dear Sir,

"Many thanks for your kindness. It WAS me who was sent back to the laundry. They told me I was coming home, but on the day I was to be discharged from hospital, one of the State sisters came with two detectives and a policeman. They told me then they were going to take me home, but when I got in the car they told me they were

taking me back to the 'Mag'. That was on the Thursday.

"On the Monday I had to tease horsehair to make mattresses for the girls to sleep on. That same day my bad ankle gave way and I could hardly walk. I complained, but they took no notice. Tuesday it got worse, but still they took no notice.

"On Wednesday I told the mistress I could not carry on as it was too bad, so she rang the hospital and they said to bring me up.

"In the meantime, my people were trying to get me out, but of course I knew nothing of this. A detective and policewoman came down to get me. Doctor strapped my ankle and told me to rest. After that they took me to the Police Station, then told me I was free and could go home. I was overwhelmed with joy.

"My ankle is still not the best as I have to go down to the hospital every second day for treatment. Rev Oates is still out at Wingfield but she is doing fine. They told me I might have to go back to school for a while.

"I received those 'Rocks' last week. If ever you publish anything else about the 'Mag' I would be very grateful if you could send it to me.

"Yours sincerely,

(Sgd.):

"Beverley Jean Plummer,  
"Hobart."